

When I moved to Kentucky in 2004, I was 4 months pregnant with my 5th child. I had been a military wife for 18 years and was blessed to have been stationed in states that offered options in birth for military families. Besides myself, I have known many military families that have availed themselves of the birth center option. Once one has personally experienced the warm and loving care of nurse-midwives in a free-standing birth center, it is often sought out again with subsequent births. I was hoping to find a similar birth experience in Kentucky when I moved here but, unfortunately, that option was not available at the time.

A birth center, staffed by trained and experienced midwives allows a woman and her family to experience birth as a natural and normal process in a very safe environment. It is a whole paradigm shift from that of a “normal” birth experience in America. I always trusted and felt safe with my midwives. Their professionalism in practicing evidenced-based birth, acknowledging when complications arise and transferring when necessary was never in question.

Midwives in a free-standing birth center spend hours talking to, educating and forming bonds with the birthing woman and her family. They become lifelong friends and often continue to celebrate the children they help bring into the world throughout the child’s lifetime. Due to constraints on OBs and their staffs, this is just not possible with medical office practices and hospital-based birth.

When a woman is in labor, she is extremely vulnerable and completely at the mercy of those around her. This is when the trust that has developed throughout her pregnancy with her midwife is most important. A low-risk, laboring woman does best when allowed to labor and birth how and where she chooses. Four days before my fifth child was born in a hospital, I was 6 cm. dilated but not in active labor even though 6 cm. is generally a measurement that indicates active labor. I firmly believe my body wouldn’t kick into active labor because I didn’t want to birth in a hospital setting but was forced to due to the lack of other options in Kentucky.

Overall, my free-standing birth center births made me feel loved, supported and trusted. I was treated as an active participant in my birth experience and my knowledge, understanding and decision making was trusted by my midwife. Being allowed to have whomever I wanted to participate in the birth experience was an incredible thing. My oldest child was able to start bonding with her brother immediately after he was born which allowed an easier transition into the home. My mom was encouraged to pray over my son before his umbilical cord was cut. That was an experience she has never forgotten and one that bonded her grandson to his family and faith. The welcoming environment in the free-standing birth center facilitated mother/baby bonding and extended family bonding, which thoroughly strengthened our family.

The time, love and support that midwives give their patients would benefit and strengthen all military families. Whether it is for a wife whose husband is deployed or a family re-connecting after deployment, the time and attention that midwives give through free-standing birth center care, should be an option available to all military families, no matter where they live.

I strongly support removal of all barriers to having birth centers available to all families. Please make birth centers exempt from the Certificate of Need Process.